BEAUTY'S SECRET.

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BOOK TWO.

LADY BEAUTY'S SISTERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE PICTURE.

[In the course of the narrative by which my old friend put me in a position to relate this story, I more than once ventured to remark that he had a surprising acquaintance with a number of facts and conversations which might be supposed to be beyond the earshot of an ordinary friend. He smiled in a very peculiar way, and I saw a faint streak of red coming out upon his cheek. Then, with a sigh, he answered that I might be satisfied that his story was a truthful one. How he came to know it so fully I need not inquire. The sadness with which this was said set me thinking; but for that time I understood no more.]

Little Mr. Brent returned home that day heartily and thoroughly ashamed of himself. His bitterest enemy could not have wished him a more humbling fall. Being a great man for letter-writing, and firmly impressed with the fatal belief that the large number of human complications can be adjusted by correspondence, he sat down after his dinner to write an explanation and apology to Mrs. Temple. The number of sheets he tore up, the enormous variety of openings which he adopted and cast aside at the fifth line, the sheets beginning "Dear Madam," then "My Dear Madam," then "Dear Mrs. Temple," then "My Dear Mrs. Temple," falling subsequently into "Mr. Brent ventures to present his respectful compliments;" and besides these the "I am overwhelmed with confusion;" "It is, I assure you, with the most poignant sensations of sorrow;" "What can I say?" "What can I urge in extenuation of my behavior?"—so many of these were begun, cast aside, and torn up very small, lest any one should find out what he had been doing, that as the night wore on the rector gradually began to look like a man who is being snowed up. When, at twenty-five minutes past four a. m., after nearly nine hours of unintermitting head work, the apology was finished, there was not left enough clean stationery in the house for a washing bill; but in place of it there were fragments of paper lying on the floor sufficient for the manufacture of six full-sized paper pillows. With aching head, yet a little consoled withal, the rector stumbled up stairs to his weary pillow.

If he used a thousand sheets for his letter it may be safely computed that one thousand and one was all that was required for the entire correspondence. Small was the paper and few the lines of Mrs. Barbara Temple's answer.

"Dear Mr. Brent"—thus it ran—"I have received your letter of apology, and I cannot say that it is at all more than the occasion required. At the same time, as you are sensible of the impropriety of your behavior, I hope you will now forget it, as I shall. One stipulation only I make. The subject of marriage—or, indeed, any allusion to what passed between us yesterday—must never be made. On these terms you are free to resume your intercourse with my daughters and myself. Truly yours, BARBARA TEMPLE."

"A very handsome letter," Mr. Brent said. "I shall take her at her word," and after lunch he drove over to the house with a splendid present of fruit and flowers, and being received in the usual friendly way by mother and daughters, and his character being a slight one, not permanently impressible, he half forgot the misery of his exit from the place yesterday. Only when he first spoke to Mrs. Temple there was a trepidation in his voice and manner; but she was so obviously determined to keep her promise that he gradually grew composed. Once only his courage quite failed him. Caroline, the student, was reading history, and with that slight affectation of intellectual pursuits, from which not even her mother's lectures could guard her, she tried to call the rector's attention to her lofty employment. The question she asked him was an unfortunate one. She was an ardent Liberal, and inquired, in a pause in the conversation, if he did not think that great good had arisen from the French revolution. The rector was so confounded by this inapposite interrogation that he nearly tumbled off his chair.

The next day his thoughts were driven into another channel. At breakfast he got a letter from his son announcing his arrival in London, and saying that he would be in Kettlewell at half-past four that afternoon. Amidst the vexation of the last two days, this was a prospect full of relief, and the young fellow was received with more than a paternal welcome. Before dinner was over, between the influence of meat and wine and the society of his son, all acting on a trivial nature, easily moved, the rector was quite comforted. Now he could have faced Mrs. Barbara Temple with a jest and a look of pleasantry. At least, so he fancied.

Brent junior was a good-looking young fellow of three and twenty, with a frank, simple manner well suited to his years. Mentally he was much superior to his father, and every sentence showed it; but he behaved with a filial deference which was pleasant to see. All through the dinner there was a touch of preoccupation and even sadness about him, and upon this his father remarked as soon as they were alone.

"I hope you have not left any one behind?" the father asked humorously.

"No," the son answered, with a blush and a laugh. "You don't think me quite a simpleton in this matter, do you?"

"Well, Percy, you are young," the sage father replied. "At *any* time of life if a man fell in love with a picture, I think he would be a bit of an ass. But then I am forty-nine. I have age and experience, and knowledge of the world."

"You are very kind to take it in that way," the son answered. "I really don't want to be laughed at."

"Is this wonderful picture in your possession?" Brent senior inquired next.

"Yes," the young fellow answered eagerly; and he was darting up stairs to fetch it. Pausing on his way, he said: "I had better tell you the story of it first."

He made no bad picture himself, leaning carelessly against the sideboard, his face and eyes kindling as he spoke with the delight of the subject. Little Mr. Brent regarded him with no small pride; and the young fellow, with a light bashfulness which made the little narrative the more interesting, told his story.

"I met an artist out there, and he and I became great friends. He fell ill, and I nursed him, and when he was getting better, one day, to pass the time, he asked me to look over his portfolio. There was a great deal in it for which I cared nothing; but just at the end he drew out a little sketch of a girl—head and shoulders—with a border of simple white dress, and, as I thought, the loveliest face I ever saw. I was quite dumb as I looked at it, and there and then, father, I fell in love; and I declare to you I felt that even if this woman were only a painter's ideal, still, so had she captivated me, that I could never give my heart to any living woman. The memory of this picture would possess me, and would hang, as it were, above the living face, and rebuke its imperfections. You are not laughing?"

"I am forty-nine, Percy," the father said, with the calmness of wisdom. "You are twenty-four."

"Well, I shall not trouble you with a long story," the young fellow continued. "Luckily for me, my friend was lying on a couch, and did not perceive my agitation, or he might have laughed me out of the dream. I found the sketch represented a real living girl—a real living girl, father!—unmarried, English, and, best of all, living not far from here. I asked for the picture, which he gave me readily. Curiously enough, he did not seem to see in it the superlative beauty which I saw. Oh, how I hung over that picture! How I idolized it! It was near me night and day, and at every glance my love for the original increased. Father, that is the woman I shall marry, if I ever marry at all!"

"You must see what her character is, Percy," the father said. "And we must make a few inquiries about family—and property."

"Her origin must be refined!" the lover cried. "Her character could be nothing but the noblest! As for property—property!—give me that girl, and I shall work hard enough to earn a world!"

So saying, he ran up stairs, and in a moment returned, bearing the precious picture wrapped up in folds of silver paper. With trembling haste, but with more than womanly care, he put back one smooth sheet after another until the cardboard lay on the table face down; then, drawing a long breath, he turned the picture up before his father.

"There," he murmured, "let her plead her own cause."

At the same instant his father uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, Percy," he said, "this girl is a friend of mine."

"A friend!" the lover cried rapturously.

"An old friend," the rector answered. "Her mother is—ahem!—an old friend of mine—a very old friend, I may say. We are quite on intimate terms. The name of this young lady is Miss Sophia Temple!"

CHAPTER II.

FACE TO FACE.

And so it was. Young Brent had fallen in love with the daughter of the woman who had just rejected his father so angrily. Mr. Brent thought at first that this alone would make an end of the thing; Mrs. Barbara Temple would not give her consent, so reasoned this parson, who knew the world so well. He kept silence on the point, however, and soon his son's ardor, carrying everything before it, made his small doubts and scruples of no effect at all.

"This picture is good—very good," the father said, gazing at it, "but I must tell you that it does not do the girl justice. Where it fails I cannot say; indeed, I can scarcely say what it is that makes Sophia Temple so handsome."

Of course the son listened to all this with greedy ears; and the conversation turned into a discussion of the prospects of the affair which for the present the father would not admit to be hopeful, still remembering his own late repulse. When, however, young Brent ascertained that his father was on visiting terms with the family he would hear no more of doubt or difficulty. With such an opening the fault must be his if he did not make the girl his own.

"You are sure she is not engaged!" he asked.

"Oh, yes, quite sure," the rector answered. "None of the girls are engaged; indeed, the only one of the family who has been talked about in that respect is the——"

Mr. Brent stopped, and turned as red as a turkey cock. He never did guard his lips well, and this disclosure came out before he remembered how awkward the subject might be. So he repeated the sentence stammeringly.

"The only one of the family that was talked about in that respect was——"

"You don't mean her mother," cried the young fellow. He was quite interested in his beauty's mother, and was ready to be interested in her grandmother if necessary.

"Yes, the mother was talked about," the rector said, still red with self-consciousness; but there was nothing in it, Percy—nothing."

"Is the mother handsome?" asked our lover, vivaciously.

"Decidedly handsome," the father replied.

"About what age?"

"Her age, Percy," the rector replied, gloomily, "has not been ascertained."

Young Brent was a man of scientific tastes, and it was to his credit that, born as he was to great expectations, he steadfastly pursued his studies, in which he was now no contemptible authority. Geology was his favorite, and he resolved to devote his energies to that science, for he was old-fashioned enough to believe that birth to good fortune imposes obligations on the inheritor. Young Brent resolved to make his mark in the world. Like all young enthusiasts, he must be for ever talking over his subjects, and he would try to interest his father in geology; but Brent senior had no patience with the insatiable demands of that science for time. "In the name of goodness," he would say, "is not six thousand years enough for you? Just think what could be done in six thousand years! Up to that time you can do as you please, but I do object to your upsetting everything on the plea of wanting time to account for a dead fish being found in one of your strata. Is it any great matter how it came there, or when? To be upsetting Bishop Usher simply because somebody has found a few bones in a rock where he did not expect it, seems to me the most monstrous thing I ever heard of."

For all that, when the easy-humored rector heard his son praised in company for his scientific attainments he was not ill pleased; and contrasting his earnest and energetic youth with the idleness and frivolity of other young fellows in the town, he was willing to excuse the mild skepticism which contented itself with requiring a little chronological elasticity from Bishop Usher. Indeed, the rector might fairly be proud of his son; intellectual ardor is seldom exclusive, and the young man's love of science gave him sympathy with much beside which was not directly scientific. He took an interest in politics, but with Radical symptoms, which his father pounced upon with vigilance and great heat, ending the dispute generally with a laugh, and the hope that things would last his time. Besides this young Brent was a good musician, and not without literary tastes, for he dabbled in poetry. But partly through studious shyness, and more from a certain physical awkwardness, he was not altogether a drawing room man. He had too great respect for women to be altogether a favorite with them; for these exalted beings, knowing their celestial qualities, cannot see why they should be approached with downcast eyes or addressed with faltering lips. So young Brent was not a lady's man, nor a company man, although there were stories of at least two pretty girls having been in love with him; and as to company, whenever the talk grew serious, Brent, as by natural right, began to speak freely, and spoke often with great success.

It was impossible to withstand the lover's entreaties, and so little Mr. Brent, divided between uneasiness and satisfaction, fearing a repulse, and yet not without hope of now wholly regaining his footing in the widow's lively house, introduced his son to the ladies. All four were in the drawing room when the gentlemen were announced, and young Brent was sufficiently master of himself not to betray any preference for one daughter before another. Indeed, he rather avoided Sophia, talked more and more freely with Caroline and Sibyl; and so few and shy were the glances he cast at her he worshiped, that four pair of female eyes did not, in a quarter of an hour, detect him as lover. Caroline rather liked his conversation, which was a trifle bookish; but Sibyl pronounced him awkward and bashful. Sophia said nothing, from which one might have fancied that she thought the more; but it is certain that, as yet, she had not recognized a lover.

Young Brent left the house enchanted. He was ready to say, like the dazzled queen of the East, that the half had not been told him. Sophia Temple did, indeed, look very lovely that morning, and as her face was in a most particular sense a face of expression, no portrait could do her justice. The young lover flew off in an ecstasy of praise. Was ever a true picture of womanhood seen before? Was not Sophia the living presentation of that image of sense and sensibility which hover around every man's fancy, as the likeness of the true woman, but which seldom takes form and feature—once or twice in a generation perhaps! I pardon the lad's raptures. And in her face that afternoon there was a delightful harmony of expression, sweetness and seriousness, animation with a suspicion of humor, and a sort of tender sadness predominating over all the rest. Is not the highest beauty always touched with sadness?

The worthy mother, who never lost a chance of instructing her daughters, and eliciting their opinions for correction, asked them what they thought of their new acquaintance.

"Dull," replied Sibyl, finishing him off with one word, imperially delivered.

"What do you say, Caroline?"

"Oh, not dull, certainly," answers Miss Bookworm; "we talked about astronomy."

"Don't mistake the drawing room for the library, Car," remarked her mother briskly. "Learned talk is very affected. Be as well educated as you please, but don't seem so. Now, Sophia, what did you think of young Mr. Brent?"

"I had hardly formed an opinion, mamma."

"You should have done so, Sophia. Never be listless. And now, girls, shall I tell you my opinion?"

"Do, mamma!" the three exclaimed. For mamma was always racy and pungent and instructive, especially in her professorial moods.

"He is a little sheepish, and he wants not only confidence, but manner as well. A few remarks from some observing lady friend, such as—"

"Yourself, mamma!" Car cried.

"Well, dear, let us say myself, then. It would do him a world of good. He is a diligent young fellow, and would soon improve if he could be got to give his mind to it. Those quiet, retiring young men have often a great deal in them, and remember, girls, that if they do not shine at the times or in the ways in which ordinary men of the world do, still they are sometimes brilliant and effective where men of mere manner and accomplishments quite fail. Don't be prejudiced, even by sheepishness, Sibyl; all is not homeliness that seems so. And Caroline, my love, *do* give up that bad habit of trying to talk what you call sense; you have plenty of attractions without that. And, Sophia, when shall I teach you not to be so listless; *appear* so if you please, for I admit it gives you a charming look at times; but still, have your wits about you. I assure you, dear, at your age, if a young fellow had been ten minutes in the room I could have told you everything about him, down to the color of his eyelashes, and no one ever called me a starer. It was observation, dear, nothing more. Now do observe. Girls," she said in conclusion, with an air of earnest appeal, "when shall I make you women of the world?"

Vigilant, energetic, good-humored, there she stood with her delicate daughters around her, training for society and conquest and applause with as much patience and enthusiasm as though she had been a religious superior making spiritual pupils ready for an eternal state. But shrewd little Mrs. Temple well knew how fleeting her world was.

"What a pity it lasts so short a time!" she would often say. "But that is not our doing. Let us make the most of it while we can."

CHAPTER III.

A PRETTY WOMAN AND A FOOL.

Fate decreed that just at this time Caroline and Sybil should each get a lover. An elderly couple of good family and fortune, Doolittle by name, lived in the neighborhood; and these having but one child, a son, who would inherit a large estate, decided to give him a profession that he might escape the dangers of an unemployed youth. He was sent into the army, and was at present upon leave.

Egerton Doolittle was a tall young man, slim, with light hair and a lisping speech. His attractions, if he had any, were neither of body nor of mind; for as to the body he was feeble in gait, with long legs of inadequate thickness, and he was destitute of eyebrows. The utmost assiduity also failed to bring out a mustache, although he used capillary fluids of appalling strength, rightly judging that for a man with a military career before him a certain amount of hair on the face is as essential as uniform or a sword. His mind was of a similar pattern—weak, reclining and inane; in a word, he had drawn the line between sanity and imbecility with a most baffling nicety. He walked with his head a little on one side, dressed in the top of the fashion, wore as many different suits as there are hours in the day, lost money mildly at cards, and came to church regularly every Sunday morning, saying his prayers out of a book the size of a sixpence. He had a creditable desire to read only such publications as were likely to improve his mind, and he always inquired if a work was erroneous or not, saying that he was afraid lest he might be led into the perusal of something erroneous, and might never find it out. He admired women and adored cleverness, frankly confessing that he had none of his own, and thought it "such a useful thing, you know." Indeed, he might have set for the immortal Mr. Toots, with whom he had so much in common that I fear readers may think Egerton Doolittle only a study of that great prince of noodles. But Egerton is a man by himself, in spite of a resemblance which fairly suggests that he is no more than a reflection.

He met Car Temple at a ball and danced with her, and the young lady, true to herself, inquired, in one of the pauses of the dance, if he had read Allison's "History of Europe." Doolittle, whose weakness was not historical study, was able, with tolerable readiness, to assure her that he had not. He then sank into silence, that this part of the conversation might settle into his mind. Presently he inquired:

"Is that work you spoke of just now a very big work?"

"Very big," she answered.

"More than one volume?" he asked, resolved not to let the talk flag.

"One volume!" replied Caroline. "A dozen, I daresay."

"A dozen!" exclaimed Doolittle. He was so overwhelmed by this statement that he did not alter a muscle of his face nor quit a syllable for full five minutes. Then he began again:

"You haven't read it, have you?"

"Oh, dear, yes," Caroline replied, with the confidence of a practised student.

"The whole dozen volumes?" inquired Doolittle, who could scarcely believe his ears.

"The whole dozen volumes," Caroline answered, repeating his words with a not ungraceful playfulness.

"Then you must be a tremendously clever girl," he said, gazing at her with profound admiration and awe.

"Clever, because I have read twelve volumes!" cried Caroline, who had a sprightly wit. "I shall read twelve hundred, and see what you say then."

"No," Egerton said, gravely; "you will not read twelve hundred volumes, I am sure."

Egerton meditated for another few minutes. Then he asked:

"Is it an erroneous work?"

"Thoroughly," Car replied, with decision. She was a Radical.

"Don't you think it dangerous to read erroneous works?"

"Don't know," Car answered. "Not very." She tossed her head with a mixture of laughter and light scorn.

"If I were to read twelve volumes of an erroneous work I should be quite upset," Egerton said, as if he were talking of lobster salad. "Upset for weeks. But you are tremendously strong and you know it—in mind, I mean."

CAROLINE TEMPLE.

Caroline was not displeased with Doolittle's frank admiration of her powers, nor did she despise it, though its silliness she plainly saw. Something told her he would one day be a lover, and she did not turn from the prospect with aversion. Doolittle was rich, but I do not mean to say that his riches alone made him tolerable in her eyes. She is not the first clever girl who has liked a man—as *husband*—because he was weak-minded. Car Temple, fond of clever men, preferred in the matrimonial relation a fool; but her actual or possible reasons for this preference must be discovered by more penetrating dissectors of human nature than myself.

Doolittle astonished his parents mightily when he informed them, with unusual bluntness and energy, that he had fallen in love. Astonishment with the old people quickly ran on into fear; for in a brain so weak as his what might not love accomplish? They trembled lest they should hear him say that some pretty milliner or shop girl had conquered him, for he affected little flirtations of that sort. When, therefore, the young simpleton gave the name of Car Temple, his parents could not altogether conceal their feelings of relief. It is true their acquaintance with the Temples was the slightest in the world; but still she was a lady, and they accepted her as daughter-in-law prospective without any hesitation. Equipped with this permission, Doolittle flew off to Oxford street, not intending to call on his beloved, or, indeed, to do anything in particular, when, as the fates would have it, he tumbled into love-making in this fashion. Who should he see, swimming gracefully up the drowsy street, but Car herself, tall, elegant and altogether bewitching. Doolittle's heart flew into his mouth. He slackened speed, lest he should come upon her before he had braced his nerves for the meeting, and while he lottered, Car turned into a haberdasher's shop. He now drew near cautiously, and soon spied her seated at the counter trying on gloves. Doolittle, never a wholly responsible being, was so fluttered that his behavior for the next few seconds must have had something mechanical in it. He stole into the shop, and Car was surprised to hear a chair softly drawn across the floor toward her, and before she could look up it was placed at her side; and then she saw Doolittle sinking into it, his eyes fixed on her face all the time as if he had been magnetized. Car felt the absurdity of the situation, but with a readiness which her mother would have praised, she resolved not to let the shop people see anything to laugh at. So she gave Doolittle a lively little nod, as if his conduct were the most natural in the world, and holding up a pair of gloves, she asked her admirer if they were not a pretty color.

"Capital gloves, I should say," he replied. "Do let me pay for them!"

"Pay for my gloves!" cried Car, breaking now into a hearty laugh at his absurdity.

"O, do let me pay for them," he went on, pleadingly. "The girl in this shop is such a nice girl—such a tremendously nice girl. I often buy gloves for her; she is so nice. Do let me pay for your gloves."

"We never pay here," Car replied, happy in her excuse. "Everything goes down in mamma's bill."

"I am sorry for that," the lover answered. "I should have liked to pay for your gloves. O, how are you? Are you very well?" he asked, addressing the shop girl, who had returned by this time.

She blushed at his salutation till she was like one of the beauties on her own glove boxes.

Whether keen-witted Car did not quite approve of this sort of encounter under her very eyes, or whether she was already suited, I cannot tell; but she remarked that she had got all she wanted and left the shop, not forbidding her admirer to follow her. Follow her he did, though in departing he manœuvered to get right behind her back, that he might freely bow his adieus to the nymph at the counter; which done, he stepped into the street with a face of great satisfaction, and walked at Miss Temple's side. For many steps he said nothing; at last he looked up.

"Miss Temple, I want to marry a tremendously clever girl. I am not clever myself; I am very well, but not tremendously clever. Now, I want to marry a girl that can advise me and tell me what to talk about, and make up things for me to say—smart things, you know—that will look like my own. And I want a girl that will read works for me, and tell me if a work is erroneous; for I don't like to read erroneous works, Miss Temple. Now, do marry me, Miss Temple; for you are exactly that sort of girl, and you will take care of me—I mean I will take care of you. At least, I want you to marry me, if you don't very much object; I do, indeed, Miss Temple."

It is a critical moment in a woman's life when she is asked if she will marry a man whom she does not altogether dislike, and no doubt Car felt something of the gravity of her position. But she felt its absurdity, too, and nothing could restrain her laughter. Doolittle seemed much discomfited.

"Don't laugh," he said, dolefully. "People always are laughing at me; and it is tremendously trying, you know."

"I was not laughing at you," Car replied, relieved now that the outburst was over. "I was only thinking how vexed mamma will be with you for speaking to me in this manner way."

"Vexed, will she?" said Doolittle, with an air of trepidation; for they were close to the gate of the Beeches. "Perhaps I had better run home. Just advise me, for I feel tremendously nervous."

"No; mamma won't be very angry," Car answered, reassuringly. "She is walking in the garden. Come in and see her."

Doolittle became confident again at these words, trusting in Car's superior knowledge; and into the garden they came, where was a great parasol moving to and fro, and under its canopy there promenaded the stately little figure of Mrs. Barbara Temple.

"There is mamma," Car cried, whether in jest or earnest he could not tell, and darting away she left him with her mother.

Now Mrs. Barbara Temple, watching the couple from beneath her parasol, had discerned in the twinkling of an eye how matters stood, and knowing the young man and perceiving his confusion, which returned when Car vanished, the little queen of women came forward with an air that would have reassured a greater dunce than Doolittle.

"You have been attending on my daughter," she said, with her pleasantest smile. "Most kind of you."

"Oh, you think it really was kind, do you?" cried Doolittle, set on his feet at once. "I am glad of that. I meant it kindly. I wanted to pay for her gloves, but she would not let me, as you have a bill at the shop."

"Mrs. Temple"—he cleared his throat desperately, and she knew what was to come.

"Yes?"

"Your daughter—the one I wanted to buy the gloves for—is a tremendously clever girl."

"People are generally pleased with her," remarked the mother.

"Tremendously pleased, I should think. Do you know, Mrs. Temple, I should like to marry your daughter, if you did not mind. I should be particular about your not minding."

Wise Mrs. Temple accepted and treated his proposal as if it had been couched in the most formal style.

"Such a desire is always complimentary," she remarked. "May I ask if your parents know of this attachment?"

"Oh, certainly, yes; this morning," he replied.

"Do they approve of it?"

"Oh, quite. In fact, my father said he was surprised at my showing so much sense; that he would never have expected it of me. Oh, yes, they are quite pleased, I assure you, Mrs. Temple."

"In that case," the managing woman said, blandly, "I shall leave the matter in my daughter's hands. I have no objection, Mr. Doolittle—indeed, that is not saying enough—I am pleased."

And in this way clever, bookish, lively Car Temple was matrimonially engaged to one who might fairly be described as the silliest young man in all England.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER ENGAGEMENT.

The next to follow—and the succession was rapid—was the beauty Sibyl. Sibyl's engagement was quite as singular as Car's, and in neither case did these really beautiful and spirited young ladies marry equals. Fortune and rank were even enough, but in all besides there was the most unexpected and unreasonable disparity.

SIBYL TEMPLE.

There lived a quarter of a mile down the road from the Beeches a wealthy bachelor named Goldmore—a man of fifty years or thereabout, tall, pompous, and imposing to look at—a man of great solemnity, who never laughed except in a responsible sort of way, and who kept his coat well buttoned round his ample frame, typifying, it might be, the reserve with which he wrapped his personality from view. He was the sort of man who, in a picture book, would look the very image of a respectable Great Briton. There was an air of steady solvency about him—a balance-at-my-banker's air—which was very telling. The most timid shopkeeper would have given Goldmore credit for a thousand pounds before even hearing his name. His mien would have carried him. With his majesty, the bigness of his frame, his vast bony features, and the sober color of his attire, he looked rather like an elephant who had cast his trunk, and was going round the world on a tour of solemn survey in a coat and trousers.

Archibald Goldmore, Esq., had a nephew—his heir—who used to come and see him often, and who, being on the lookout for a wife, was struck with the beauty of Sibyl Temple. This Harry Goldmore was a lively young fellow, but no great favorite with his uncle. He was heir, because there was none other forthcoming, but nephew and uncle never quite hit it off. The young man was one of those fortunate, or unfortunate, people—very much either they are sure to be—who, without being exactly selfish, have yet an inordinate idea of their own claims upon life and their fellow-creatures, with a proportionate disregard of other people's feelings. Young Goldmore would always help himself to the best, even before his uncle's eyes, and would never say, "Uncle, won't you try this?" or "Let me recommend so and so"—trifling attentions, but by such little acts young men sometimes make their fortunes. The nephew, too, well knowing that his uncle employed an unsurpassable cook and prided himself upon his table, would yet in the most flippant style find fault with dishes, and declare that in his club in London the cooking was fifty times better.

"Outrageous sauce this!" he exclaimed one evening as he tasted his boiled mutton; "enough to put one off one's feed."

"At your age," remarked his uncle solemnly, "I got very little sauce at all."

"*Grace* enough, I daresay!" retorted the witty young man, with a great roaring laugh, after which he finished his mutton and asked for another help, administering the condemned sauce plentifully.

From these few hints every reader of observation can fill up a sketch of this young fellow's character, and it need only be said that he was tolerably good looking, by no means vicious, and with very passable manners, becoming almost agreeable on the rare occasions when, standing in awe of somebody, he had the sense to curb his frolicsome disposition.

He saw Sibyl Temple. Used as he was to believe the finest he could find for him, the finest vintages grown for him, the richest dishes cooked for him, he hearing and seeing that Sibyl was the handsomest girl in Kettlewell, easily concluded that she had been reared for him. So he began making eyes at her and having perceived that she noticed his attentions—which she could not fail to do—he treated the conquest as made, and told his uncle on Sunday at lunch that he loved Miss Sibyl Temple, and that he had little doubt that she reciprocated the passion.

Beneath some of our big, middle-aged waistcoats there lie strange secrets. This ponderous Archibald Goldmore, elevated, pompous, and remote from sentiment as he appeared, had a buried sorrow of his own. Years ago his only brother, Harry Goldmore's father, died. The two brothers had ever been fondly attached. Life's early struggle they had faced side by side, and an affection never to be destroyed had, during those early years, laced their hearts together. The brother died. In dying he put his thin white hand out from under the bed clothes, and, catching Archibald's wrist, begged him not to forget his little son, soon to be an orphan. Archibald promised, and that promise, never broken, and re-enforced year after year by memories of the dead man, made the uncle merciful to the rudeness and the folly of this rash and uncongenial youth. When the young man spoke of marriage, in some inexplicable way a reminiscence of long ago stole into the uncle's heart, and made him sad and gentle.

"Harry," he said, with unusual kindness, "you are young to marry, and have little of your own, but I approve of the idea on the whole. I shall make your way plain."

"Oh, that of course," replied the easy youth. "I settled that in my mind long ago," and he laughed loudly.

"Suppose we make a call on the Temples to-morrow," the uncle said.

"No, not to-morrow, thank'ee," the passionate lover said, shaking his head. "To-morrow I ride over to Blancourt to see Jefferson. Never hurry after the women. They think quite enough of themselves without our help;" which delicate speech he enlivened with a fresh laugh, loud, hearty and vacant.

The matter dropped, but at dinner that day, after the cloth had been removed, Archibald Goldmore, gravely renewing the subject, said:

"In a curious way your choice of Miss Temple—we say nothing about her view of the matter—"

"O, that's all right enough," young Harry said.

"That we shall see," his uncle remarked; "for the present, never mind. I was going to say your choice approves itself to me; for do you know, Harry, I once had thoughts of proposing to the young lady myself."

"Of *what?*" screamed the nephew.

"Of proposing to the young lady myself," the uncle repeated.

"Of *what?*" exclaimed the nephew, again in a scream of undoubted surprise. He could neither believe his ears nor disbelieve them.

"Of proposing to the young lady myself," Archibald Goldmore answered once more with steady solemnity.

His nephew would hear no more. He burst into a roar of laughter, threw himself back in his chair, laughed loud and long, changed the key of his laugh, went high, went low, slapped the table, and in a general way signified that the most comical idea ever heard of since ideas first began had just been let loose upon the world.

"It is perfectly true," the uncle said, used to his nephew's mad moods, and not as yet affronted.

"At your age!" screamed the nephew, "marry a lovely girl like that! Do you think she would have looked at you?" and so in a variety of phrases he put the absurdity, saluting each fancy with a fresh outburst of ridicule, while the uncle sat fuming over insults which were truly exasperating. But he was a man of great self-restraint, and he said nothing.

All that night the nephew persisted in his ridicule. "Uncle, what kind of a coat would you be married in?" "Where would you have gone for your honeymoon?" "How many bridesmaids would you have had?" "Would it not have been suitable to have sage spinsters of fifty?" and so on in an inane, but offensive, succession. The rude young fellow thought only of his sallies and his amusement; perhaps a little tincture of annoyance lay at the bottom, and made his jests taunts indeed. In any case, he jested to his heart's content, and the uncle, boiling with anger, disclosed nothing of his fury. The nephew thought of a final witticism. After they had gone to bed he marched to his uncle's door and tapped, and the uncle, hearing his voice, which for wittier effect he pitched low and serious, fancied he was going to apologize. The great man opened his door.

"Uncle," said the nephew, in a grave tone, which carried on the illusion.

"Well, Henry?"

"Something has just struck me."

"Well, Henry?"

"I could not go to bed without asking you."

"What is it?"

"Make me godfather to number one."

He dropped his voice lower than ever. And screaming again with rapture, he retreated down the corridor, and left his uncle to go to bed with what appetite for sleep he might.

The next day he rode over to Blancourt, and at night returned to dinner. He was tired, and spoke little beyond a grumble at the fish. But when dessert began, feeling his energies recruited, he thought it time to show something more of his playful ways.

"Thought again about your marriage, Uncle?"

"Yes, Henry."

"You could not do a wiser thing than to propose to a young beauty," said this young man of fatal rudeness. "The younger and the more beautiful, the wiser you will be."

Here came the facetious scream. It was always the same—short, shrill, spasmodic, irrational.

"So I think, Henry."

(TO BE CONTINUED).

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